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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASTANA 000319

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [AF](#) [PK](#) [RS](#) [KZ](#)

SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: FOREIGN MINISTER TAZHIN SAYS RUSSIA
MUST BE INVOLVED IN AFGHANISTAN EFFORTS

REF: A. STATE 14097

[1](#)B. STATE 15959

Classified By: Ambassador Richard E. Hoagland, 1.4 (b),(d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The Ambassador discussed the U.S. government's Afghanistan-Pakistan policy review and the increase in U.S. military forces in Afghanistan with Foreign Minister Tazhin on February 24. Tazhin said that the Kazakhstani government is considering providing reconstruction and humanitarian assistance for Afghanistan during 2009-10. He argued that despite differences in views between the United States and Russia, we have to involve the Russians in our Afghanistan efforts. Tazhin expressed concerns about Afghan President Karzai's reconciliation efforts with the Taliban, and described negotiating with the Taliban's core leadership as a "dangerous" idea. He said that Kazakhstan might be able to host training programs for Afghans. Tazhin recommended holding ministerial or sub-ministerial conferences on Afghanistan on a regular basis. END SUMMARY.

KAZAKHSTAN CONSIDERING ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE

[1](#)2. (C) The Ambassador met on February 24 with Foreign Minister Marat Tazhin to discuss the U.S. government's Afghanistan-Pakistan policy review (reftel A) and the increase in U.S. military forces in Afghanistan (reftel B). (NOTE: We sent an advance copy of reftel A's key points to the MFA several days in advance so that Tazhin would be prepared to give a substantive response. END NOTE.) Tazhin described the situation in Afghanistan as a "complex problem" which involves not only Afghanistan itself, but also its neighbors, and termed the Coalition presence there a "serious stabilizing factor." He added, "We understand very clearly the strategic consequences of Afghanistan."

[1](#)3. (C) Tazhin noted that Kazakhstan has agreed to participate in the Northern Distribution Network of commercial transport of non-military goods to Afghanistan. (NOTE: Tazhin pointed out -- as he has done on previous occasions -- that we approached Russia about the Northern Distribution Network first, before we discussed it with Kazakhstan, implying again that this was a slight to the Kazakhstanis. END NOTE.) Tazhin reminded the Ambassador that the Kazakhstani government had provided humanitarian and reconstruction

assistance to Afghanistan during 2008. He said that despite the difficult budget situation, Kazakhstan would try to do so again during 2009-10, though perhaps on a more modest scale, and promised to discuss the issue with President Nazarbayev and Prime Minister Masimov.

RUSSIA NEEDS TO BE INVOLVED

¶4. (C) After the Ambassador reviewed, at Tazhin's request, Russian efforts over the past several years to get the Kyrgyz to force us out of Manas Air Base, Tazhin responded that the presence of U.S. forces in Central Asia has not changed the strategic balance in the region and that the base is thus mainly a "psychological issue" for the Russians. The strategic implications of failure in Afghanistan are much more important than differences over the base, he argued. In any event, the Russians do understand the strategic importance of Afghanistan and the potential dangers for Russia and for Afghanistan's neighbors, Tazhin maintained. "I always explain to the Russians that Afghanistan is not a local conflict, it's a much more serious phenomenon, and it's not just about terrorism, but rather about the possible revival of Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia," he explained. Tazhin hinted that the Russians may have felt shut out on some occasions, and claimed, for example, that Russia offered to train Afghan customs officials in Moscow, but this was nixed by "Western experts" who believed that Russia would be training them to spy. In any event, Tazhin said that despite differences in points of view, the United States simply has to involve Russia in our Afghanistan efforts, adding that he would raise Afghanistan when he visits Moscow in March.

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CONCERNS ABOUT RECONCILIATION WITH TALIBAN

¶5. (C) Tazhin expressed concerns about Afghan President Karzai's reconciliation efforts with the Taliban. He said he understood why the Afghan government would want to co-opt some moderate Taliban factions, but maintained that there are political limitations on dialogue and compromise. He described negotiating with the Taliban's core leadership as a "dangerous" idea that could call into question why the Coalition went into the country in the first place in 2001. He said, "Those people will never change." Tazhin said that he welcomed attempts to create loya jirgas at the local level, so long as they take into account the country's ethnic composition. Stressing the importance of inter-ethnic reconciliation, he said that Tajikistan and Uzbekistan should be able to provide help on this issue.

TRAINING IN KAZAKHSTAN

¶6. (C) Tazhin explained that because the Obama Administration is making Afghanistan a higher priority, Kazakhstan will see what more it can do in Afghanistan, once it has more information about the results of the U.S. policy review. Noting that international assistance to Afghanistan includes significant funds for training, he said that the Kazakhstani government stands ready to find opportunities to host Afghans for training. He explained that training Afghans in Kazakhstan makes sense because of Kazakhstan's geographic proximity to Afghanistan as well as the cultural affinities between the two countries. Tazhin pointed out that during Soviet times, most Afghan students who studied in the USSR did so in Kazakhstan and the other Central Asian republics.

¶7. (C) Tazhin noted that French Foreign Minister Kouchner had organized an international ministerial conference in support of Afghanistan in Paris in June 2008 -- which Tazhin himself could not attend because of other commitments. He suggested that such conferences be held on a regular basis at the ministerial or sub-ministerial level to institutionalize high-level exchanges of views. He added only half-jokingly that some of these high-level meetings should take place

without experts because "experts often tell ministers how to think and what to say."

HOAGLAND